

## **TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSING COMMITTEE**

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Senator Moore, Representative Luxenberg, Senator Sampson, Representative Scott, and members of the committee, my name is Sean Ghio, and I am Senior Policy Advisor at the Partnership for Strong Communities. We are a statewide nonprofit policy and advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring everyone in Connecticut has a safe, stable home that is affordable to them in an equitable community of their choice. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on several bills before you today.

**We ask the committee to support the following bills:**

**H.B. No. 6633 - AN ACT CONCERNING A NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND FAIR SHARE PLANS FOR MUNICIPALITIES TO INCREASE AFFORDABLE HOUSING.**

Connecticut needs more homes for more people in all our towns. Every Connecticut resident needs the security and stability that an affordable home offers. Our towns can be great places to live while also becoming more affordable. A diversity of housing choices brings economic vibrancy and mobility to our towns, regions, and state. Every Connecticut community must contribute to meeting the housing needs of our state, including permitting its fair share of housing for both low- and moderate-income households.

H.B. 6633 will provide for an assessment of the need for affordable housing and an allocation of the need to planning regions and municipalities resulting in affordable housing planning and zoning goals for each municipality as well state support to meet affordable housing needs. A similar model of assessment has been in place in New Jersey and has contributed to the creation of tens of thousands of units of affordable housing in that similarly high-cost housing state.

We know that Connecticut's out of reach housing costs are a driver of its economic stagnation. Housing options, affordable at a range of incomes, are critical to attracting businesses to Connecticut, allowing CT families to free up income for other critical needs, like education, generating a pathway to middle-income stability. A fair share system in Connecticut communities can use thoughtful planning and zoning to unleash the market's ability to generate mixed income housing with affordable units and play a foundational role in launching a new wave of economic growth for the state while guiding their own destinies.

Fair Share Housing involves taking a hard look at our state's true need for affordable housing and then, together with towns, planning to meet that need. Having a target goal will incentivize towns.

And they will benefit from technical assistance from the State to reach their goals. Enforceable consequences will further ensure success.

Having a greater diversity of housing choices, including affordable housing, will create diverse, vibrant, and environmentally sound communities. A fair share system will help us achieve these goals.

#### **H.B. 6780 - AN ACT CONCERNING TENANTS' RIGHTS.**

We support this bill's reasonable improvements to the conditions under which a tenant rents a home. The bill will permit tenants to conduct a walk-through inspection of a dwelling unit before moving in, limit fees a landlord may charge in connection with tenant screenings, and require landlords to provide written notice to certain protected tenants of their legal rights regarding evictions. These changes are very limited and do not change in any significant way the tenant-landlord relationship.

We support measures to ensure Connecticut families who rent their homes have predictability, stability, and affordability. Connecticut's rental market is out of balance, and low-income renters are bearing the cost. That these bills are before your committee, that so many renters are telling you their stories, demonstrates just how unhealthy our housing system has become. It is in these circumstances that we rightly look to the state to protect renters and ensure a stable rental market.

Rents have increased 24% since 2017 resulting in evictions occurring at higher rates than pre-pandemic averages.<sup>1</sup> This past Valentine's Day had the most eviction filings per day (215) since the court began keeping comprehensive electronic records in 2017.<sup>2</sup>

Renter income has not increased at the same pace as skyrocketing rents, putting especially low-income renters at a distinct disadvantage and at high risk of housing instability, eviction, and homelessness. Research demonstrates that once median rent surpasses 30% of an area's median income, the rate of homelessness begins to increase more rapidly. Fairfield County has already surpassed that threshold with median rent costing 32% of median income.<sup>3</sup> 52% of CT renters are housing cost-burdened, meaning they spend more than 30% of their gross monthly income on rent. Black families, undocumented families, seniors, and people with disabilities disproportionately experience housing cost-burden in our state.

The state must explore many policy options as part of a comprehensive set of tenant protections. This bill will make improvements to Connecticut rental system in three small ways, but the state must consider much more to create a more stable and affordable rental market for the 1 in 3 Connecticut households that rent their home.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.apartmentlist.com/research/category/data-rent-estimates>

<sup>2</sup> <https://ctmirror.org/2023/02/16/ct-affordable-housing-lamont-budget-money/>

<sup>3</sup> County level median rent figures taken from <https://www.zillow.com/research/data/>. Median income figures from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/fairfieldcountyconnecticut,CT/PST045221>



Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

